



The psychological distance of climate change

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Abstract:

Avoiding dangerous climate change is one of the most urgent social risk issues we face today and understanding related public perceptions is critical to engaging the public with the major societal transformations required to combat climate change. Analyses of public perceptions have indicated that climate change is perceived as distant on a number of different dimensions. However, to date there has been no in-depth exploration of the psychological distance of climate change. This study uses a nationally representative British sample in order to systematically explore and characterize each of the four theorized dimensions of psychological distance--temporal, social, and geographical distance, and uncertainty--in relation to climate change. We examine how each of these different aspects of psychological distance relate to each other as well as to concerns about climate change and sustainable behavior intentions. Results indicate that climate change is both psychologically distant and proximal in relation to different dimensions. Lower psychological distance was generally associated with higher levels of concern, although perceived impacts on developing countries, as an indicator of social distance, was also significantly related to preparedness to act on climate change. Our findings clearly point to the utility of risk communication techniques designed to reduce psychological distance. However, highlighting the potentially very serious distant impacts of climate change may also be useful in promoting sustainable behavior, even among those already concerned.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Public

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

Unspecified Exposure

Geographic Feature: ☒

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location: ☒

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Europe

European Region/Country: European Country

Other European Country : United Kingdom

Health Impact: ☒

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Health Outcome Unspecified

Mitigation/Adaptation: ☒

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Mitigation

Resource Type: ☒

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale: ☒

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified